

A
S E R M O N,
ADDRESS'D TO
Four Sorts of People.

- I. To Those who pretend thoroughly to
Disbelieve the Truth of Religion.
- II. To Those who only Doubt of it.
- III. To Those who never Enquire into
the Matter.
- IV. To Those who profess a Thorough
Belief of it.

By a PRESBYTER. *K*

L O N D O N :

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The One Thing

S. E. R. M. O. N.

FOUR SORTS OF PEOPLE

I. TO THOSE WHO WOULD HAVE THEM



II. TO THOSE WHO WOULD HAVE THEM

III. TO THOSE WHO WOULD HAVE THEM

IV. TO THOSE WHO WOULD HAVE THEM

THE END

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P R E F A C E.

THE following Discourse was intended to be preach'd, but the Chain of my Thoughts led me into some Things out of the Reach of the Capacities of my Congregation. After having said This it will not be expected that I should put my Name to it. I have nothing more to offer, by Way of Preface, but that I have no other View in publishing it, besides an honest Inclination to do some Good. I have the Pleasure to find myself much affected by it, and am not without Hopes that it may have some Influence upon a few more. To be the Instrument, under God, of forwarding the Salvation of Mankind is the greatest Honour that we can have in This Life, and the only Pleasure that is worth a wise Man's Living for. I am a Candidate for another World; and what should make an IMMORTAL Being very anxious, or much delighted, but the Thoughts of IMMORTALITY? I am Travelling to a Country from whence I shall never Return; and I see many of my Fellow-Travellers as intent upon their Accommodations as if They were at Home, and scrambling for what They are going to Leave behind Them. I see Them with some Amaze-

P R E F A C E.

ment, with more Concern, but with as little Envy as I see a Party of Children highly pleas'd with their Childish Diversions, or squabbling about their Marbles. I wish, the Employment, and Amusements of a great Part of Mankind were as innocent; I am sure They are, comparatively, as insignificant.

READER; *If you be not quite Mad, be Wise for Eternity.*

Farewell.

13 MR 63

St.

St. LUKE Chap. x. Verſe 42.

But one Thing is needful.

TH O' the Occaſion of theſe Words was particular, the Inſtruction intended to be convey'd by them is general, *viz.* That Religion, and the Security of our future Happineſs, ought to be our grand Buſineſs and Concern in this Life; that they are, in their Importance, ſo infinitely ſuperiour to all other Conſiderations, that our Saviour ſtiles them the one Thing needful; nothing elſe, when compar'd with them, being of any Moment at all: As the longeſt Period of Time is ſwallow'd up in the immeaſurable Abyſs of Eternity, like a Drop of Water in the largeſt Ocean. This momentous and awful Truth I purpoſe to make the Subject of my preſent Diſcourſe.

But, why ſo much Pains to prove what no Man in his Senſes will offer to deny? Evident as this Truth is, when conſider'd, it is as evident that very few conſider it, ſo as to give it its proper Influence upon their Conduct; and therefore the moſt Learned, the moſt Knowing, the moſt Religious, may be the better for Admonition, when they ſtand in no need of Inſtruction. Let not any one then, be his Parts
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and Attainments ever so great, disdain to read a plain Discourse. Plain, as I intend to make it, I hope, by the Grace of God assisting me, to make it so clear and strong, that it shall be the Reader's Fault if he be not the better for it. I will presume it will be allow'd me that there is such a Thing as Wisdom and Folly; that there are certain Maxims and Rules of Conduct, which are establish'd by the universal Consent and Practice of Mankind, in respect to their worldly Concerns: Upon these Maxims I purpose to argue with you: And if they have any Force, when apply'd to your Conduct in the Affairs of this Life, they must hold much stronger when apply'd to the Concerns of a future State, where our Happiness, or Misery, will be greater and more lasting, Eternal and Inconceivable. In my further Discourse upon this Subject, I shall address myself to four different Sorts of People.

First, to those who pretend to disbelieve the great Truths of Religion upon full Conviction, after a diligent and impartial Examination of the Evidence on both Sides the Question.

Secondly, To those who only entertain some Doubts about it.

Thirdly, To those who never give themselves any Concern about the Matter.

Fourthly, To those who profess a thorough Belief of them.

1. I shall in the first Place address myself to those unhappy Persons who pretend to disbelieve the great Truths of Religion, upon full
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Conviction, after a diligent and impartial Examination of the Evidence on both Sides of the Question. I say, who pretend to do so, for I am fully satisfied that out of the Number of those, who profess themselves such settled Infidels, there are very few that are really such. One I knew, who died as determin'd as he liv'd; but that *Collins* and *Toland* did not, I have good Reasons to believe. Neither do I think that there ever was an Infidel who had examin'd the Evidence on both Sides of the Question, with Diligence and Impartiality. They may have taken a good deal of Pains to enquire into the Arguments, but then it has been with an intent to find Objections, not to receive Information. They brought strong Prejudices and Prepossessions with them, imbib'd early by the means of bad Company, or bad Books; or else arising from the Inconsistency of religious Truths, with the Indulgence of some favourite Vice, which they were determin'd not to part with. But if they wou'd act rationally, they must attend to the Evidence, without any Biass from an Inclination to Infidelity. For if they wish that Religion may not appear to be true, like the Jaundice that gives a false Colour to every Object, such an Inclination will certainly hinder the Mind from seeing any Argument in its proper Light. But is this acting wisely in a Matter of such infinite Moment? For our Inclinations cannot alter the Nature and Force of Arguments. Religion will not be the less true for our wishing that it were not so. But I will venture to affirm, that, in the Nature of Things, it

is utterly impossible that any Man can have sufficient Evidence upon which he may build a rational, firm Conviction, that what we call the great Truths of Religion, the Existence of a God, a Providence, and a State of Happiness, or Misery in another Life, are Fictions. On the Side of Infidelity there can be no direct Evidence at all, since no Man can demonstrate that the Supposition of a God, a Providence, and a future State, is absurd and impossible. Neither is it any Absurdity, or Contradiction to the Nature of Things, to suppose that there may be a Revelation. All that any sensible Infidel can say, is, that there is not sufficient Evidence, upon which we may build a full and clear Conviction of the Truth of these grand Points; there can be, as I said, no direct Proof on the other Side of the Question. This naturally leads me,

Secondly, To apply myself to those, who are in doubt about these great Truths. For Argument's Sake, I will suppose, that the Truths do not appear quite satisfactory; yet if they carry any Degree of Credibility with them we ought, in common Sense, to act as if there was a moral Certainty of their being true. I wou'd ask these Doubters, how they wou'd think it prudent to act under such a State of Uncertainty, with Regard to their present Happiness. I will state the Matter as strongly in Favour of Infidelity and Irreligion, as I possibly can, by supposing (what every one knows to be false) the Practice of Religion and Virtue to be always attended with an uninterrupted Series of Self-denial and Mortification, with every Sort and Degree of Evil, which

which human Nature is capable of suffering in this Life; and that a vicious Course of Life is as uniformly accompanied with every Sort and Degree of Happiness that human Nature is capable of enjoying. Now, let us suppose, that, if the former has the Patience to persevere in the Practice of Religion and Virtue, for one Week, under such hard Circumstances, he has a Chance (let the Chance be as low as can be imagined) of being rewarded, at the End of this short Period of Time, with an uninterrupted Series of the most consummate Happiness that human Nature is capable of enjoying for ten thousand Years, in a Country the most delightful that can be conceiv'd, and abounding with the greatest Plenty of the most valuable and agreeable Products, and constantly enjoying them with the keenest Appetite, in Company with the most instructive and agreeable Companions, always studying how to please and serve one another. Let us again suppose, that the vicious Man stands the same Chance of his being punished for his poor Week's Enjoyment, with every Sort and Degree of Misery that human Nature is capable of feeling for ten thousand Years; living in a barren Country, that does not afford one agreeable Object to please the Eyes, but is full of frightful Scenes; of Storms and Tempests; tormented with Appetites that He cannot gratify, in Company with the most disagreeable Persons, whose only Musick is the Sound of Curses, whose only Delight is to give Uneasiness to one another, and in utter Despair of having their Condition mended.

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I have put a very fair Case; and if there be such a Thing as Common Sense, I appeal to it for an Answer. Wou'd not any Man of the lowest Share of Understanding, wou'd not any one, but a downright Madman, or Ideot, suffer such a short-liv'd Misery for the lowest Chance of such a noble Prize? Or what cou'd be thought of him, who, for the Sake of a Week's Enjoyment, wou'd run the least Hazard of being so compleatly miserable for so long a Period of Time as ten thousand Years? And does the longest Life of Man on Earth bear as great a Proportion to Eternity, as a Week does to ten thousand Years? No; the longest Period of Time bears no Proportion at all to Eternity. A Duration that is not in the Power of Numbers to measure. O! vast Eternity! how dost thou swallow up our Thoughts, and fill us at once with Delight and Amazement. Thou art like the Sight of God, so dreadful, that it is difficult for mortal Man to look on thee attentively and live. And if the bare Conception of Eternity be so affecting, how will you be shock'd if you add the Idea of Misery to Eternity! Shou'd we form to ourselves the Imagination of immediately becoming miserable without Intermission and without Hope, during our whole Life, the very Thought wou'd make us turn pale and tremble. Extend your Apprehension to the Age of *Methuselah*; then add a Million of Ages; go on to multiply the Product of that Sum by as many Millions as Figures can express; and then think, if you can bear the
Thought,

Thought, that after the Expiration of this long, long Period, you will be no nearer the End of your Misery than you was at the Beginning of it. O Eternity! What art Thou! Where am I! I am lost. My Head swims, and I grow giddy. Do thou, O blessed Jesus, strengthen my labouring Mind. I faint, I sink, do thou support my Spirits. Let me, then, thou Sceptic, beseech thee to act like a Man, like a rational Creature. I defy thee, with all thy boasted Reasoning, to demonstrate that thou shalt not be eternally happy or eternally miserable, in another Life, according as thou demeanest thyself in this. And does not the Consideration of the infinite Difference between Time and Eternity, make it a Point of the greatest Wisdom to act upon much less Evidence than we have for these Truths. For, in Matters of such unspeakably great Importance, it concerns us always to be on the surest Side, where we venture least, if we shou'd happen to be mistaken. And which is the surest Side? To believe, or disbelieve Christianity, and such a State of future Rewards and Punishments as are the Sanctions of it? If Christianity be true, (and they cannot disprove the Truth of it) and there be an eternal State of Rewards and Punishments inconceivably great, we are undone for ever; but if we do believe it, and live up to its Precepts, we lose nothing by it but the transient Pleasures of Sin, and instead of them we have the joyfullest Hopes; which to a good Man are more ravishing and tran-

transporting than any of the Enjoyments of this World can give to the Wicked. In short, the Miseries denounc'd against Unbelievers are so very terrible, that no thinking Man in his Senses would run the least Hazard of them; but instead of demanding Demonstration of there being such a Place of exquisite Torment, wou'd demand demonstrative Certainty, that there is not, before he wou'd venture: And the Happiness promis'd to good Christians so far exceeds our Imagination, that a very little Evidence wou'd perswade a truly wise Man to venture any Thing for the Sake of it. Before I take Leave of these Doubters, who, professing themselves wise, act very foolishly and madly, I must observe, that tho' I have condescended to argue with them upon their own Principles, it is not because the Evidence for religious Truths is really weak and doubtful! Had I Time I cou'd shew that it is sufficient to create a moral Certainty. As to myself, I no more doubt of them, than if I had the Evidence of Sense and strict Demonstration to convince me. And the oftener and more attentively I examine into them the more I am convinced. And this has been the Case of Numbers in all Ages, of the greatest Abilities both natural and acquir'd, who have consider'd these Points with the utmost Diligence, Coolness, and Impartiality. And surely, the concurrent Testimony of such a Variety of the most learned and judicious Persons, confirming, by their Opinions and Practice, the Strength of the positive Evidence for Religion, both natural and reveal'd, demand
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so much Regard from every wise Man, as to induce him not to act as if Religion were false, till he can find better Authorities and clearer Proofs in Support of Infidelity or Scepticism. But these Men never attempt to bring any direct and positive Proofs, but only start Difficulties, and endeavour to weaken the Force of our Arguments. And is this sufficient to justify them in risking the Loss of eternal Happiness, and running the Hazard of being eternally miserable? This is bringing a Scandal upon Reason and Common Sense. But I shall give you another pathetic Illustration of their Madness and Folly from Dr. *Webster's* Sermon upon Impenitency, p. 14 and 15, speaking of those who doubt of these Things, he says, "It is not enough to doubt, but you must be assur'd, by the clearest Arguments, that what the Gospel says of Heaven and Hell is all Romance. If walking in the dark, you shou'd hear a Multitude of People, with the utmost Earnestness and Concern, crying out aloud, Travellers, I beg of you to quit your Road instantly, for it leads to a bottomless Pit, where you will lie in Pain and Misery for ever, and you are got upon the Brink of it. Tho' you shou'd not immediately be fully convinc'd, wou'd not the bare Possibility of its being true, the frightful Apprehension, make you take another Road, if you knew of one where there cou'd be no such Danger? I say, wou'd you in such a Case

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dare to move one Step further in it? No, you cou'd not do it. Your Imagination wou'd fill your Mind with such Horror, that your Limbs, as well as your Heart, wou'd fail you. This, thou Doubter, is a true, but faint Image of thy Condition. You are walking in thick Darknefs, not knowing whither your present Course of Life will lead you. Under this Uncertainty you hear the Prophets, the Apostles, the Martyrs, and Confessors for Christianity; you hear Teachers and Writers, without Number, in all Ages, and from all Parts of the World, crying, Hold, miserable Wretch! the Path in which you are now going will lead you to eternal Destruction. If you will take the contrary Road, you will find it in general full as pleasant, and, in some Parts of it, much pleasanter, and it will carry you safe to a most delightful Country. And, for your Encouragement to take our Advice, we are so far from having any Interest, or bad Design, in giving you this Intelligence, that we take the same Road ourselves, but not before we had us'd all possible Means of Information concerning the Nature and Tendency of it. You see how foolishly and madly they act, let not therefore their Characters, be their Rank, their Parts, their Reputation, what they will, any way influence your Judgment, or Practice, but look upon them, as they are, Objects of Compassion for their Unhappiness, and of Indignation for their Wickedness." But

Thirdly,

Thirdly, There is another Set of Men, who, if possible, act more foolishly and madly, than either of the other. For, though these Points must be acknowledg'd to be of the last Importance, they have never thought it worth while to consider them, never thought of them, at all, but live extempory Lives; follow the Impulse of every Passion that happens to move them; pursue every Scheme that occurs to their Mind; without ever looking forward to Consequences. The others judge and act extremely wrong, unbecoming Philosophers; But these Men act below the Conduct of the animal Part of the Creation. Beasts and Birds act with more Regard to Self-Preservation. As far as Instinct teaches them wherein their Danger lies, they are ever watchful, ever studious, to avoid it. Only these Beasts of Reason act without any Regard to their own Safety. In order to illustrate the exceeding great Folly of these heedless, giddy Creatures, I shall borrow another Illustration from the Sermon above-mention'd, p. 8. "Suppose a skilful Architect should give a Man Warning that his House is so decay'd, that it is in Danger of tumbling over his Head, shou'd not such Notice oblige him in common Prudence either to quit it instantly, or, at least, to have it carefully examin'd, before he ventures to continue in it? And, if, notwithstanding this friendly Caution, he shou'd strive, by Business, or Pleasure, to divert his

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Thoughts

Thoughts from attending to his Danger, instead of avoiding it, wou'd not the World say that the Man was distracted, or that he was utterly void of common Sense? And, yet, this is an exact Picture of this monstrous Indolency." I must ask this Writer's Pardon; for the Case is not parallel. The Men of whom I am speaking, have Warning of a Danger infinitely greater, and, yet, are as unmov'd by it. And if any accidental Cause shou'd force them to entertain a transient Thought of their Danger, they are very industrious to banish it out of their Minds; as if they could take away the Reality and Certainty of their future Misery by not thinking of it. But, as they are not likely to attend to any Thing that can be said to them, I shall say no more upon this Head. I should have been quite silent, if I had not been in Hopes that others might learn Wisdom by seeing a strong Picture of their Folly. I come, now

In the *Fourth*, and last, Place seriously to address myself to those who profess a thorough Belief of religious Truths. And I must tell such Christian Readers, that in some Respects, they act more inconsistently and absurdly than either of the other three Sorts of People. The First pretend to be fully perswaded that Religion is a Cheat, and that there is no such Thing as a future State; in Consequence of which Perswasion, they think it prudent to make the most of this World, to
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make their own present Interest and Happiness the sole Rule of their Conduct. They judge wrong in entertaining such a settled Opinion, where there can be no positive Proof; but they act right upon their Principles. The Second Sort are as much to blame, in running the Risque of losing eternal Happiness, and bringing eternal Destruction upon themselves, only because the Evidence for the Truth of those grand Points does not appear to them sufficiently clear and strong, for, in Matters of such infinite Moment, a less Degree, any Degree of Evidence ought to govern their Conduct; but grant them their Premises and their Conclusion will be just. The Third Sort act as absurdly, but with some Difference. The next World is invisible and distant; the Things of this World are present and visible; from whence they conclude that it is not worth their while to trouble themselves about such Matters. They agree with the others in acting very madly, but they differ in this Circumstance, that, whereas the former act right upon wrong Principles, these act wrong in Consequence of just Premises. It is true, that this World is present and visible, but it does not follow from thence that invisible and distant Things cannot be worth the Consideration of a wise Man. But these last sort of Fools and Madmen, are in every Respect inconsistent and inexcusable, for they act in Defiance of their settled Principles; they believe

lieve Christianity, they publicly profess their Belief of it; and yet daily, hourly, and deliberately contradict their Faith in their Practice. Have the Patience to give Attention while I enlarge a little upon the monstrous Inconsistency of such Conduct. I have a Right to demand this of you, because you acknowledge that the Subject is of such vast Moment, that it deserves your most attentive Consideration.

The first great Truth and Foundation of all Religion is, the Belief of a Deity who made you, and made you capable of knowing and contemplating and imitating his moral Perfections; you profess to believe that Reason and Revelation teach you that it is your Duty, and will be your Happiness so to do; and yet, how many nominal Christians ever think seriously, how many scarce ever think at all about the Nature and Attributes of this adorable Author of their Being, and Fountain of their Happiness; unless it be now and then, when they are put in Mind of him at Church, or in Conversation. You profess to believe that this Being, infinitely wise, just, good, and powerful governs the World; and do Christians in general act agreeable to this Persuasion? Do they submit and resign themselves to his Dispensations? No, if they did, whence so much fretting, so much murmuring, so much Distrust under any Afflictions and Disappointments? Whence so many indirect Means to extricate ourselves, when we believe and acknowledge that if we trust in him, and apply to him, every thing shall work together

together for our Good ; that he will either remove our Difficulties, or support us under them, or reward us for bearing them patiently ? You believe that it is your Duty privately and publickly to worship God, as frequently, as attentively, and as fervently as possibly you can ; and yet how many of you never address yourselves to him in Prayer in private, or with your Family ? How often do you neglect publick Worship upon such scandalous trifling Pretences, as wou'd not hinder you from going to make a common Visit, or taking your Pleasure ? And when you are at your Devotions, with what Inattention, with what Coldness and Irreverence do you perform them ? I do not mean only the poor and illiterate, but Persons of better Education and more Knowledge ; not excepting some of the Great, and the Learned. And can such People sincerely believe that Religion is the one thing needful ? You must bear with my honest Freedom a little longer.

Christians believe the Bible to be the Word of God ; that it is an inestimable Treasure of the most excellent, the most useful, and entertaining Knowledge ; that it contains every thing that is necessary for us to believe and practise, in order to our eternal Happiness ; that it is both in Respect to the Author, and Subject Matter of it, worthy of the most profound Reverence, and constant and most careful Perusal. And do Christians in general, like holy *David*, make it their constant Study and chief Delight ? No, they seldom look into it, as if it were the most
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dull and insipid, the most trifling and useless Book that ever was publish'd. Nay, (I hope to be excus'd on Account of an honest Intention) I have too much Reason to fear that many Scholars, tho' they occasionally look into it as Critics; and Commentators, to study the Sense of a difficult Passage, do not read it daily, and practically, to direct their Conduct in moral Life, and to warm their Hearts with a feeling Sense of Piety. But is this shewing that you believe Religion to be the one Thing needful? Wou'd you treat any Book with such Contempt, that taught you any infallible Way to Success in Trade, to Riches and Honours. I need not wait for an Answer, Christianity tells us [and you profess your Belief of it] that the Way to eternal Life is narrow, and that we must strive to enter into it; that we have many strong Passions and Habits to subdue; many difficult Virtues to acquire; many Temptations to seduce us; many Enemies within our own corrupt Hearts to betray us; many subtle, vigilant, potent Enemies from without, to allure and terrify us; that we are always wrestling, not only against Flesh and Blood, but against Principalities and Powers, against spiritual Wickedness in high Places; that we are to be perpetually upon our Guard against the Wiles of the Devil and his Agents, as well as against the Treachery of our corrupt Nature; to take heed to our Ways, to keep the Door of our Lips, and to watch the secret Motions of our Thoughts; and therefore, that the
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working out of our Salvation being a Thing of such Labour and Difficulty, as well as infinite Importance, we ought to do it with Fear and Trembling. But let any one look round upon Mankind and observe, whether their Looks and Actions speak any such State of Warfare and Danger. Instead of being anxious for the Event of so momentous an Affair as our eternal Salvation, they look quite easy and unconcern'd. Instead of being vigilant, they are quite careless; instead of being active, they are quite indolent. And is this Behaviour consistent with a Persuasion that we think our future Welfare the one Thing needful? The Professors of Christianity declare that they are Citizens of another Country, that their true Riches are in Heaven, and that their heavenly Treasure will be as durable, and inconceivable, as the Torments of the Wicked. And yet Christians in general are so far from having their Thoughts so full of an Immortality of such a Bliss, as to have it always lie uppermost for a constant governing Principle, that they seldom think of it. Their Thoughts, their Inclinations, their Maxims and Schemes, are all sensual, and worldly. One Man is wholly intent upon a Circle of Amusements and Diversions. This is the grand Business of his animal Life. Another is as intent upon accumulating Wealth and making a Family; his Head and Heart are quite full of it. A Third is wholly possessed with ambitious Desires; Places and Honours he must have, let the means of acquiring Them be ever so inconsistent

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with the Precepts of his Religion, and his future Happiness and Glory. It is impossible that such Men shou'd think their Salvation the one Thing needful, when they take so little Care to secure it. And yet these narrow minded Creatures (I cannot call them Men) think themselves, and are thought by others to be, the only shrewd People, because they value the poor, beggarly Concerns of this Life above those of Eternity. O gracious God! whence arises this Sottishness? It is thou only, the Searcher of Hearts, that knowest the true Cause. Do thou take the Veil from before our Eyes. Break the Charm that bewitches us. Convince us that nothing but Eternity deserves our Sollicitude; that our Salvation is the one Thing needful, and that whatever does not tend to it is Vanity and Folly. Make us see more clearly, and know more feelingly, these great Truths. Let them always be uppermost in our Thoughts, and give them such Force and Energy, that they may bring forth in us the Fruits of good Living, to thy Honour, and the Salvation of our Souls.

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